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THE INFLUENCE OF INDIA ON WESTERN CIVILIZATION IN MODERN TIMES¹

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Modern civilization begins in 1776 with the publication of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Its formative period may be taken to have closed with 1815, when the fall of the Napoleonic empire, on the one hand, and the almost assured success of the "industrial revolution" on the other were laying the foundations of a new inter-political system and a new socio-economic order throughout the world. Ever since the year 1 of this new culture India has been in intimate touch with the West; for by the Regulating Act of 1772, the year of the partition of Poland, England took charge of the administration of the eastern provinces of the present British India.

It goes without saying that the achievements of the Occidental world in industry, science, philosophy and the fine arts during the nineteenth century have profoundly influenced the thoughts and activities of the people of India, as of other regions in Asia. But what is most likely to be missed by the student of culture-history is the fact that even the ancient and medieval civilization of the Hindus has been one of the feeders of this modern civilization itself; i.e., that the cultural movements in Europe and America since 1776 have been affected to an appreciable extent by the achievements of free India down to that period.

1. NAVAL ARCHITECTURE

In the days of the sailing ships and oaken vessels the naval engineering of the Hindus was efficient and advanced enough to be drawn upon with confidence for European

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shipping. At Madapollum, for example, on the Madras Coast, many English merchants used to have their vessels yearly built. The Hindu ship-architects could ingeniously perform all sorts of iron work, e.g., spikes, bolts, anchors, etc. "Very expert master-builders there are several here," says the English traveler, Thomas Bowrey in his *Geographical Account of Countries Round the Bay of Bengal (1669-1675)*; "they build very well, and launch with as much discretion as I have seen in any part of the world. They have an excellent way of making shrouds, stays, or any other riggings for ships" (p. 72, etc.).

Writing even so late as 1789, on the eve of the industrial revolution in Europe, Solvyns, the French traveler, could still recommend, in his *Les Hindous*, the Hindu method of uniting the planks as "not unworthy of the imitation of Europeans" (Vol. III, sixth number, ed. 1811). He says: "In ancient times the Hindus excelled in the art of constructing vessels, and the present Hindus can in this respect still offer models to Europe." (Ed. 1789, cited by Mookerji in his *History of Indian Shipping*, p. 250.)

In the building of a boat the Hindus began by choosing a large piece of timber which they bent as they pleased. To the two ends of this they attached another piece thicker than it, and covered this simple frame with planks; "but they have a particular manner of joining these planks to each other, by flat cramps with two points which enter the boards to be joined, and use common nails only to join the planks to the knee. For the sides of the boat they have pieces of wood which outpass the planks. This method is as solid as it is simple." (Solvyns, Vol. III, sixth number, ed. 1811.)

Some of the Hindu methods were actually assimilated by the Europeans. Thus, as the French writer observes: "The English, attentive to everything which relates to naval architecture, have borrowed from the Hindus many improvements which they have adopted with success to their own shipping." (Mookerji, p. 251.) Further, the Portuguese "imitated" the pointed prow in their India-ships. This was a characteristic feature of the grab, a Hindu ship

with three masts. (Solvyns, Vol. III, fourth number, ed. 1811.)

The industrial and material culture of Old India was thus sufficiently vital to influence contemporary Europe at the threshold of the nineteenth century civilization.

2. THE SO-CALLED BELL-LANCASTERIAN PEDAGOGICS

During the formative period of the modern educational systems, also in Europe and America the pedagogy of the Hindus, especially on its elementary side, has played an important part.

It is well known that primary education was grossly neglected in America during the first half-century of her independence. In England even so late as 1843, 32 per cent of the men and 49 per cent of the women had to sign their names on the marriage register with a cross. Illiteracy was the rule in France also at the time of the Revolution, as Arthur Young observed. Guizot's educational commission (1833) found that "the ignorance was general" and that "all the teachers did not know how to write." (Compayr , *History of Pedagogy*.)

In an age of paucity of "public schools" private educational efforts naturally elicited the people's admiration. And none drew more sympathy and support than Andrew Bell's (1753-1832) "mutual-tuition" or "pupil-teacher" or "monitorial" system of school management. His first school was founded in England in 1798, but in less than a dozen years 1000 schools were opened to teach 200,000 children. (Painter's *History of Education*, p. 305.) This "mutual instruction" was a craze in France also under the Restoration (Compayr , p. 515). The same system known in America after Lancaster (1778-1838), the English rival of Dr. Bell in theology, was in vogue in the New England States during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. (Parker, *History of Modern Elementary Education*, 102, 241, 264, etc.) It could become so universal simply because of its cheapness as it did not involve the appointment of teachers. And as to its educational value, Bell was so en-

thusiastic as to declare, after visiting Pestalozzi's School at Yverdun in 1815, that in another twelve years mutual instruction would be adopted by the whole world and Pestalozzi's method would be forgotten. (Quick's *Educational Reformers*, p. 352.)

What, now, is the origin of this much-applauded mutual-instruction or monitorial system, the so-called Bell-Lancasterian "discovery" in Pedagogy? Historians of education are familiar with the fact that the plan of making one boy teach others has been indigenous to India for centuries. (Compayré, 6, 514; Painter, p. 305; Meiklejohn, *An Old Educational Reformer*, Dr. Andrew Bell, pp. 25-26.) Bell, himself, in his *Mutual Tuition* (Pt. I, ch. I, V) describes how in Madras he came into contact with a school conducted by a single master or superintendent through the medium of the scholars themselves. And, in fact, in England the monitorial system or the method of making every boy at once a master and a scholar is known as the "Madras system."

England's debt to India in pedagogics has been fitly acknowledged in the tablet in Westminster Abbey, which describes Andrew Bell as "The eminent founder of the Madras System of Education, which has been adopted within the British empire, as the national system of education for the children of the poor." (Narendra Law's *Promotion of Learning in India by Early European Settlers*, p. 49, 61.)

3. "SHAKOONTALA" AND THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

The romantic movement in Germany and England, with its after-math, the English pre-Raphaelite movement, has been the greatest force in Europe's modern letters and art. The poetry of Old India has furnished an impetus to this current also of nineteenth century thought.

The "Shakoontala" of Kalidas, the Hindu dramatist of the fifth century A.D., was Englished by Jones in 1789. Forster's German rendering (1791) of it from the English version at once drew the notice of Herder (1744-1803), the

great champion of comparative methodology and "Welt-literatur." And Herder introduced it to Goethe, on whom the effect was as tremendous as that of the discovery of America on geographers, and of Neptune on students of astronomy. Goethe's ecstasy expressed itself in the ultra-enthusiastic lines:

Wilt thou the blossoms of the spring, the fruits of late autumn,
Wilt thou what charms and enraptures,
Wilt thou what satisfies and nourishes,
Wilt thou in one name conceive heaven and earth,
I name, Shakoontala, thee, and in that is everything said.

These are the words of a man who in 1771 had dramatized the narrative of Gotz, a medieval bandit. The sentiment in favor of the Rousseauesque "state of nature," the love of "ancient reliques," the Bolshevik revolt against the *status quo* of art, the subversion of classic restraint, the lyric abandon to the promptings of the imagination, the awakening of the sense of wonder, and the craving of the soul for the unknown, the mystery—a great deal of all that was later to be associated with Scott, Shelley, Schiller, and La-Martine had been anticipated and focused in that drama of "Storm and Stress." It is not strange, therefore, that the great "futurist" of the eighteenth century, the father of modernism in European literature, should have welcomed the Hindu Shakespeare as warmly as he did the Elizabethan. For in Goethe's eyes wistfully looking for more light, more spontaneity, more freedom, both shed the "light that never was on sea or land," the one as the star of the Middle Ages, the other as the sun of a hitherto unknown world.

"Shakoontala" left an indelible impression upon the literary activity of this pioneer of romanticism. It is the story of a woman with child deserted by her lover. The Gretchen-episode in the tragedy of Faust may thus have been inspired by the dramatist of India. At any rate, German critics have pointed out that the conversation between the poet, the manager and the Merry Andrew in the prelude to "Faust" is modelled upon that in Kalidasa's play, in which the manager and one of the actresses talk as to the kind of performance they are to give.

The "Shakoontala" *furore* has lasted till almost today. One of the noblest "overtures" in European music is the "Shakoontala overture" of the Hungarian composer Goldmark (1830-1915).

4. THE "GEETA" IN EUROPE AND AMERICA

Another force that Old India has contributed to the life and thought of the modern world is the profound optimism of the "Geeta" (ca. B.C. 600-200?), a section of the "Mahabharata" (the Great Epic). The "Geeta" was translated into English in 1785. It was popularized in Germany by Herder. Since then its *leit motif* has been absorbed by the sponge-like minds of the greatest thinkers of Europe and America. It may be said to be held in solution in almost every great "poetical philosophy" or "philosophical poetry" of our times down to Bergsonian "intuition."

In the first place, the "Geeta" is the philosophy of duty and *Niskama Karma* (work for its own sake), of the "categorical imperative." In the second place, it tries to solve the mystery of death, which is but an aspect of the larger and more comprehensive problem of the evil. The solution is reached in the enceptions of the immortality of the soul, the infinite goodness of God, the nothingness of death and the virtual denial of the existence of evil. Such postulates are of the deepest significance as much to the lover who seeks an "eternal" union of hearts, as to the warrior who must bid adieu to the body in order to save the soul. This Bible of Old India has therefore influenced not only the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis but also Tennyson's "In Memoriam" and Browning's "La Saisiaz," both inspired by the death of friends.

The "obstinate questionings" in Browning's poetry are the same as those of Arjuna in the "Geeta:"

Does the soul survive the body?
Is there God's self—no or yes?

The answer in both "La Saisiaz" and the "Geeta" is in the emphatic affirmative. It is a message of hope to suffer-

ing humanity. Men and women in distress can brace their hearts up if they are assured that somehow through God's mysterious dispensation the good persists in and through the evils that are apparent. This Hindu optimism is voiced also by Walt Whitman, the voracious student of world-thought, in the following words:

Roaming in thought over the universe
I saw the little that is Good steadily hastening towards immortality,
And the vast all that is called Evil
I saw hastening to merge itself and become lost and dead.

Tennyson had made only a tentative and halting statement to the same effect:

Oh, yet we trust that *somehow* good
Will be the final goal of ill.

But the paean of the Upanisadic *Ananda* (or bliss) and *Amrita* (or immortality) rises clearly forth in Browning:

Why rushed the discord in, but that harmony should be prized?

Further,

The evil is null, is nought; is silence, implying sound;
On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect round.

The syllogism of the "Geeta" leads, indeed, on such-like arguments, to the more drastic conclusion:

Up then! and conquer! in thy might arise!
Fear not to slay the soul, for the soul never dies.

Even militarism and man-killing are thus not evils in Hindu optimism. No wonder that the "Geeta" should have been a source of inspiration to the most diverse minds seeking comfort and strength. It could not fail to be a trumpet to the prophets of Duty, and such prophets were Carlyle, the sage of Chelsea, and Mazzini, the political mystic of the Italian regeneration.

With the memorable words, "Close thy Byron, Open thy Goethe," Carlyle sent forth his *Sartor Resartus* to the English people, as the manifesto of an all-round Germanism. This German *Kultur* was the idealism of Kant, Lessing,

Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, the nearest European ally of Hindu Monism. It opened the Anglo-Saxon mind to the sense of the infinite, of the majesty of the spiritual self, and electrified the soul to the recognition of the "duties that lie nearest thee." The gospel that taught people to "make thy numerator zero in order that the quotient may be infinite" converted the Bostonians of the trans-Atlantic world from Lockites into metaphysicians. This "new thought" of the day was worshipped by Parker and Emerson around the "Dial." The New England Transcendentalists thus became kinsmen of the Hindus.

5. HINDU TECHNIQUE IN POST-IMPRESSIONIST ART

"Modern" is the term that seems to have been monopolized by the artists who claim Cézanne as their inspirer. And yet in this modernism Old India's paintings and sculptures have been a stimulating force.

The plastic art-creations at Bharhut and the frescoes at Ajanta constitute in stone and colour the poetry of the whole gamut of human emotions from "the ape and tiger" to the "god-in-man." The encyclopaedic humanism of Hindu art is indeed comparable only to the comprehensive secularism in the painted *bas reliefs* of Egyptian hill-caves and the stately *Kakemonos* of the Chinese masters. While the message of the artists and craftsmen of India is thus universal as the man of flesh and blood, they developed certain peculiarities in the technique and mode of expression which "he that runs may read."

The most prominent characteristic of the Hindu sculptures and paintings is what may be called the "dance-form." We see the figures, e.g., Shiva, the prince of dancers, or Krisna, the flute-player, *in action*, doing something, in the supple movement of limbs. Lines in graceful motion, the play of geometric contours, the ripple of forms, the flowing rhythm of bends and joints in space would arrest the eye of every observer of the bronzes, water-colours and *gouache* works in India. Another characteristic that cannot fail to be noticed is the elimination of details, the suppression of

minuter individualities, on the one hand, and, on the other, the occasional elongation of limbs, the exaggeration of features, etc. All this is brought about by the conscious improvising of a new "artistic anatomy" out of the natural anatomy known to the exact science of Ayurveda (medicine). In the swollen breasts, narrowed waists, bulky hips, etc., of Late Minoan or Cretan (*ca.* 1500 B.C.) works which bridged the gulf between the Pharaonic and the primitive Hellenic arts we can see the analogues or replicas of some of the Hindu conventions.

Leaving aside other characteristics, e.g., the absence of perspective, the grouping of colour-masses, the free *laissez faire* treatment of sentiments, etc., one can easily pick up the Hindu elements from the Cézannesque paintings and Rodin's sculptures and drawings.

Let us listen first to Rodin lecturing on the beauties of Venus of Melos:

In the synthesis of the work of art the arms, the legs, count only when they meet in accordance with the planes that associate them in a same effect, and it is thus in nature who cares not for our analytical description. The great artists proceed as nature composes and not as anatomy decrees. They never sculpture any muscle, any nerve, any bone for itself; it is the whole at which they aim and which they express. (Dudley's transl., p. 15.)

It is this theorizing that virtually underlies Hindu art work.

Similarly Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890), the Dutch painter, who, if not in execution like Cézanne, has at least, in ideal, pioneered the new art movement of today, seems almost to have given the theory of Hindu art from the side of painting. He says:

I should despair if my figures were correct; . . . I think Michelangelo's figures magnificent, even though the legs are certainly too long and the hips and the pelvis bones a little too broad; . . . It is my most fervent desire to know how one can achieve such deviations from reality, such inaccuracies and such transfigurations, that come about by chance. Well, yes, if you like, they are lies, but they are more valuable than the real values. (*The Letters of a Post-Impressionist*, translated from the German by A. M. Ludovici, p. 23.)

Rodin was charged with the crime of being an "innovator" in art for he introduced movement and action into statuary. His "St. Jean Baptiste" (1880) is a specimen in point, as also the interlaced figures like the "Hand of God" holding man and woman in embrace, "Cupid and Psyche," "Triton and Nereid," etc. With regard to this "new technique," the representation of activity, we are told by Van Gogh that the "ancients did not feel this need."

To render the peasant form at work is, I repeat, the peculiar feature, the very heart of modern art, and that is something which was done neither by the Renaissance painters, nor the Dutch masters, nor by the Greeks. (*The Letters*, 22, 24.)

It is thus clear why the theory and practice that seek movement in art-forms, appreciate an "incorrect" anatomy and look upon arbitrary proportions as not distortions but "restorations," should find an affinity with the work of the Hindu masters. And the psychology of this post-impressionist art-credo is perfectly natural, because like the previous pre-Raphaelitism and the still earlier romanticism, the new art movement is essentially a revolt. It is a reaction against the Academicians' rule of thumb. It is born of a discontent with the things that be, and of a desire to search for truth and beauty from far and old.

This latest revolution in art was brought about when Gauguin, the French master, conceived

the truth that the modern European and his like all over the globe, could not and *must not*, be the type of the future. Anything rather than that! Even black men and women were better than that—cannibals, idolators, savages, anything! (Ludovici's introduction to *The Letters*, etc., p. xii.)

With such an article of faith the present-day artists have been seized by "Wanderlust." Today they draw their inspiration from the Mexicans and American-Indians, from the Negro art of the Congo regions, from Karnak and Nineveh, from the Tanagras of Greece and the "primitives" of Italy. And they roll their eyes from "China to Peru." The Buddhist, Shaiva, Vaisnava, Moghul and Rajput arts of India have but enlarged the list of the new Ossians

and Percy's "Reliques" as whetters of the "futurist" imagination.

6. MANU AS THE INSPIRER OF NIETZSCHE

Nietzsche's Dionysian cult is one of the latest great forces in world-culture. The web of recent Eur-American life is being supremely invigorated by the warp of the Nietzschean *Will to Power*. It is interesting to observe that almost the whole of this new cult is reared on Hindu humanism and energism. Old India has contributed its hoary Manu as the master-builder in order to boss the super-men who are to architecture the Occident of the twentieth century.

Nietzsche, like the "futurists" of all ages, believes that the world is in need of a thorough-going "transvaluation of values." How is that to be effected? The means to the re-humanizing of humanity have been devised, says he, by the Hindus. "Close thy Bible, open thy Code of Manu" is his prescription. And why? Because Manu is the proponent of an "affirmative" religion—the religion of the "deification of power," whereas Christianity is the creed of the slave, the pariah, the chandala. (*The Will to Power*, Vol. I, Bk. II, p. 126.)

One breathes more freely, after stepping out of the Christian atmosphere of hospitals and poisons into this more salubrious, loftier and more spacious world. What a wretched thing the New Testament is beside Manu, what an evil odour hangs around it! (*The Twilight of Idols*, p. 46.)

In Nietzsche's estimation Manu is a better because more frank teacher of political science, also, than the insincere philosophers of the Western world. Thus, "Manu's words again are simple and dignified; 'Virtue could hardly rely on her own strength alone. Really it is only the fear of punishment that keeps men in their limits and leaves every one in peaceful possession of his own.' " (*The Will*, Vol. II, Book IV, p. 184.)

In international politics Hindu theory since the days of Kautilya (fourth century B.C.), the Bismarck of the first

Hindu empire, has been candidly Machiavellian. Nietzsche finds greater truth in the mercilessly correct view of inter-statal relations given by the Hindus than in the hypocritical statements of Occidental statesmen whose actions belie their words.

Rather what Manu says is probably truer: we must conceive of all the states on our own frontier, and their allies, as being hostile, and for the same reason, we must consider all of their neighbors as being friendly to us. (*The Will*, Vol. II, Book IV, p. 183.)

This is the celebrated doctrine of *Mandala* (circle of states) fully described in Kautilya's *Artha-shastra* and Kamandaka's *Neeti*, both treatises on politics.

The fundamental reason for Nietzsche's sympathy with, and advocacy of, Hindu culture is to be found in the fact that the Hindus were keenly alive to the animality in human life and interests, and that their "Weltanschauung" embodied the joy of living in its entirety. As Nietzsche observes, Manu has "organized the highest possible means of making life flourish."

The fact that, in Christianity, "holy" ends are entirely absent, constitutes my objection to the means it employs My feelings are quite the reverse when I read the Lawbook of Manu, an incomparably intellectual and superior work It is replete with noble values, it is filled with a feeling of perfection, with a saying of yea to life, and a triumphant sense of well-being in regard to itself and to life, the sun shines upon the whole book. All those things which Christianity smothers with its bottomless vulgarity, procreation, woman, marriage, are here treated with earnestness, with reverence, with love and confidence." (*The Antichrist*, p. 214-215.)

It is this secular outlook, this positive standpoint, this humanism that has given a sanctity to life in Hindu thought. "I know of no book in which so many delicate and kindly things are said to woman, as in the Lawbook of Manu; these old graybeards and saints have a manner of being gallant to women which perhaps cannot be surpassed." "The breath of a woman," says Manu, on one occasion, "the breast of a maiden, the prayer of a child, and the smoke of the sacrifice are always pure." Elsewhere he says; "There is nothing purer than the light of the sun, the shadow

cast by the cow, air, water, fire, and the breath of a maiden.”
(*The Antichrist*, 215.)

7. SANSKRITIC CULTURE AND THE “COMPARATIVE” SCIENCES

The greatest *differentium* between the modern civilization and all that the world witnessed between the Chaldaean ages and the eve of the industrial revolution is the phenomenal expansion of the human mind. This has brought in its train a catholicity of interests and toleration of divergent views. In this emancipation of the intellect from the thralldom of parochial and racial outlook, Old India's contribution has probably been the most helpful and significant. The reason is not far to seek. The “discovery of Sanskrit” by the European scholars of the eighteenth century opened the portals to the series of sciences called “comparative.” And it is this that has rendered possible the recognition, though not complete yet, of the fundamental uniformity in the reactions of man to the stimuli of the universe.

The first fruit of the discovery was “comparative philology.” Jones founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal at Calcutta in 1784, and in 1786 hit upon the hypothesis of a common source of Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Gothic, Celtic and Persian. The linguistic survey was pursued more systematically by the poet Schlegel, who, in his *Die Weisheit der Indier* (1808, *The Language and Wisdom of the Indians*) announced that the languages of India, Persia, Greece, Italy, Germany, and Slavonia were the daughters of the same mother and heirs of the same wealth of words and flections. Comparative philology was scientifically established by Bopp's *Das Conjugationssystem* (1816) and “*Comparative Grammar*” (completed in parts between 1833 and 1852).

Once the unity of the Indo-Aryan or Indo-Germanic languages was realized, the road was opened to the interpretation of ideas, ideals, rituals, customs, superstitions, folk-lore, etc., on a more or less universal basis. This has ushered in the sciences of comparative mythology and com-

parative religion, for which Max Müller's *Sacred Books of the East* series is chiefly responsible. The investigation has not stopped at this point. Secular, economic, political, and juristic institutions and theories have been attacked by the methodology of comparative science, and the result has been works like Maine's *Village Communities* (1871), *Ancient Law*, and *Early History of Institutions* (1876). More "intensive" studies have indeed compelled a modification of the conclusions of the pioneers; but, on the whole, in the field of social science Sanskritic culture has been demanding a gradually enlarging space.

The trend of latter-day scholarship is to detect, through the ages of history, the close parallelism and *pragmatic* identity between Hindustan and Europe not only in theology and god-lore, but in rationalism, positive science, civic life, legal sense, democratic ideals, militarism, morals, manners, and what not. The evidences from the Hindu angle are being supplemented in recent years by the findings of Egyptology, Assyriology, and Sinology, i.e., the sciences dealing with extra-Aryan culture-zones. The establishment of a comparative psychology of the races, past and present, Oriental and Occidental, is thus being looked for as the greatest work of anthropological researches in the twentieth century.